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The Charmed Reboot: What Went Wrong? (Part 1)

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Image from the CW

Part 1 of a series evaluating the pitfalls of the CW Charmed reboot.

Upon discovering that there was a *Charmed* (1998) Reboot underway, unlike a preponderant amount of the *Charmed* fandom I was cautiously optimistic. I quieted the inclination to lambast this modernized rendition of a beloved original and opted to adjudicate the project through the lens of measured expectations. Expectations were measured because it was made almost immediately clear that this version of *Charmed* would have virtually nothing to do with the original save for the fact that it shared the same premise of three sister witches endowed with great ancestral magic, tasked to save the world from evil.

And that's fine. It's a reboot not a continuation or a sequel. I think reboots should be afforded a certain degree of latitude as it relates to how much or how little they choose to subscribe to the core creative and thematic underpinnings of the "original". Also, I think it makes for a considerably less unpleasant viewing experience if consumers engage media with little to no preconceived notions (easier said than done, of course). We do ourselves a disservice by holding media to unquantifiable standards and we set ourselves up for crushing disappointment when said media falls short of our capricious grading criteria.

Image from The CW

With that said, I saw *Charmed* (2018) as an opportunity to revisit a concept rife with storytelling potentialities albeit under notably different circumstances and pretences. For example, this version of *Charmed* is situated within the fictional fiefdom of Hilltowne. Additionally, in this new instalment of the *Charmed* legacy there are two sisters, Mel (Melonie Diaz) and Maggie (Sarah Jeffery) Vera who are introduced to a half sister in Macy Vaughn (Madeleine Mantock) and these sisters three are the proprietors of the Charmed prophecy.

The first season of the show is patchy in some areas and a bit ham-fisted in its delivery of socially topical messages but that doesn't detract from how enjoyable it is or the quality and depth of the over-arching story that is being developed. Macy's penchant for science and empirical evidence is a delight, and the integration of science with magic makes for an incredibly fun viewing experience.

Mel, being the opinionated Social Justice Warrior, does chafe initially with how one-dimensional and "preachy" she can come across at times, but throughout the course of the first season she does grow on you. The first season does a fantastic job at deepening the complexities of her character and exploring these different facets of woman, witch, activist and superheroine in a way that endears you to the character and her professional and personal relationships.

Conversely, Maggie, the wet-behind-the-ears aspiring sorority member is a refreshing foil to her elder sister's more inflexible and dogmatic views on the world and on society. Maggie is still feeling her way through life and she makes for a compelling audience surrogate as we see her grapple with issues surrounding identity politics and romance.

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Unfortunately, come season 2, a lot of this promising set-up is thrown out the window.

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Season 2 marks an astronomical shift in the show's trajectory, tone and mythology. For all intents and purposes it may as well have been a reboot of the reboot. By no means am I disparaging the creative masterminds behind the narrative choices made in the second season, but in retrospect it's got to be blatantly evident that there were several missteps and misfires made all in the name of executive (meddling) mandates.

It's commonplace for seasons of a long running series to be distinct from one another in terms of tone and ambiance. For example, *Stranger Things* 1 is tonally and aesthetically different from *Stranger Things* 3, and that works to the benefit of the series and for the gratification of the audience. This contrast and variation in approach to production and storytelling allows the creators and the viewership to explore different facets of the characters and the world that has been created.

But that's not what happened with Season 2. Season 2 of *Charmed* (2018) was a glorified hatchet job. It wanted nothing to do with the lore, character development or narrative eccentricities that had become unique to the show, and was very much concerned with shoehorning the conceit of *Charmed* into a run-of-the-mill superhero adjacent show. Season 2 put me in the mind of the Bryan Singer *X-Men* movies. Movies that were flagrantly and vociferously ashamed of their fantastical comic book roots.

Post-Season 1 *Charmed* (2018) became a show that balked at the idea of being too witchy or of being too woke and divisive. It played it too safe (pun intended) to the point that the show become a slog to get through. In addition to the radical transformation in story, several characters were inscrutably jettisoned without so much as a by your leave. Characters such as Jada (Aleyse Shannon), Nico (Ellen Tamaki), Gavin (Ser'Darius Blain) and Lucy (Natalie Hall) are completely annexed from the series in a way that feels violently egregious. To my knowledge, none of these characters are referenced in a substantive way following the move to SafeSpace Seattle, and the audience is left flabbergasted as to the fates of these individuals who had become transfixed into the fabric of *Charmed* (2018) as it was originally conceived.

Now, admittedly, for reasons I'm not privy to, Season 1 essentially ploughed through at least 4 season's worth of storyline in 1. Season 1 alone witnessed the vanquishing of several characters such as Alistair (Craig Parker), Charity (Virginia Williams), the Source of All Evil and a litany of several other adversaries. This does make for a somewhat spasmodic if not enthralling viewing experience in that a lot of these vanquishes and plot-lines are not accorded the room to breathe.

Image from The CW

Overall, though, irrespective of its faults, Season 1 was ambitious and exploratory in a way that lends itself exceedingly well to the *Charmed* universe. Where Season 2 fails, is its lack of ambition and scope. It becomes suffocatingly parochial that everything feels insular and isolated. All 19 of the allotted episodes for this season are mired within some plot regarding something of a faction or whoever that goes essentially nowhere, and that's only the tip of the iceberg!

To be continued...

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Currently studying English and Film Studies at the University of Sussex. I'm passionate about living and thriving and going to the gym and movies.